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AUTHOR Jongeward, Ray
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ABSTRACT

Tabulated results of a 1976 National Federation for the Improvement of Rural Education (NFIRE) survey soliciting 140 opinions (a 43% return on 322 survey forms) re: rural education priorities are presented in this paper. These results include the total number of persons responding to each item and the resultant ranking of all items in the survey. Clustering into six groups, the grouping of survey items of highest concern is presented as follows: limited course offerings for students, especially at the secondary level; lack of financial support programs aimed at alleviating problems in remote rural areas; limited number of special services (e.g., music, library, special education, etc.) due to small enrollments and high costs; the need to find new ways to encourage citizen participation, strengthened problem solving and decision making skills, interagency communication and collaboration; recognition on the part of Equal Education Opportunity (EEO) agencies that geographic isolation and smallness inhibit EEO for rural students. Survey items rated high (75-78%) are presented as follows: the high cost of education for rural students, especially when enrollments are spread over a large geographic area; the small budgets available to meet local needs; and the limited inservice training opportunities for rural teachers and administrators. (JC)

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# NFIRE NATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

by Ray Jongeward

At the 1975 NFIRE Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, the NFIRE Board of Directors authorized the preparation of a position paper in support of rural education. The broad purpose for this paper was to create more awareness of the status of rural education in 1976 by highlighting the major areas of concern that are troubling rural educators. Hopes were also expressed that such a statement could be used with legislators and the media to promote increased support at local, state, and federal levels.

A three-member committee was appointed to pursue the development of the position paper. They were:

Dr. Larry Heldman, Catskill School Study Council, Oneonta, N.Y.

Dr. Everett Edington, ERIC-CRESS, Las Cruces, N.M.

and Chairperson, Dr. Ray Jongeward, NWREL, Portland, Oregon

A tentative design was created while committee members were still in San Antonio. Refinements added later included a timeline as follows:

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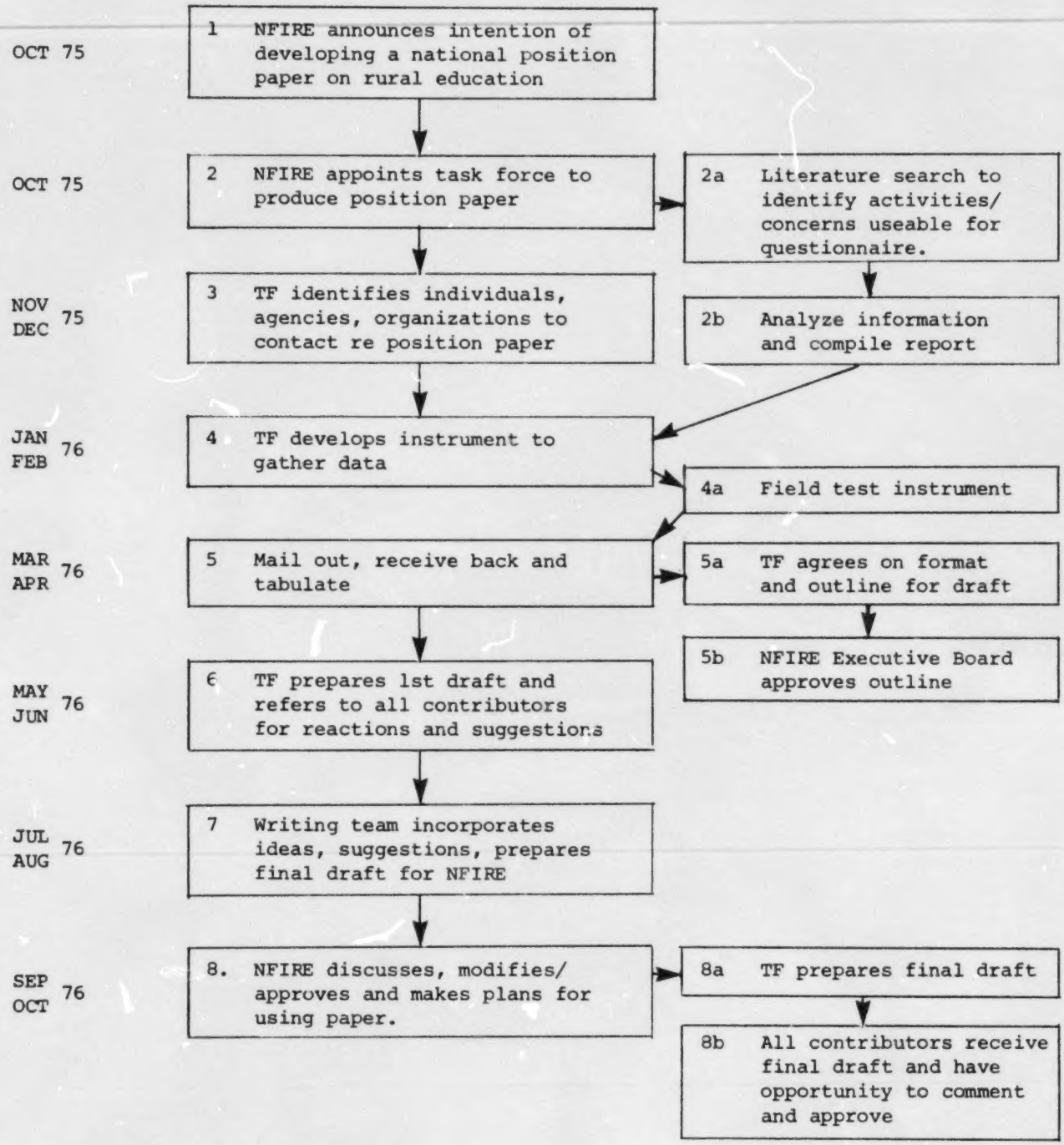
The NFIRE Plan to Develop a Position Paper

on Rural Education


OCT 75
1 NFIRE announces intention of developing a national position paper on rural education
OCT 75
2 NFIRE appoints task force to produce position paper
2a Literature search to identify activities/ concerns useable for questionnaire.
NOV DEC 75
3 TF identifies individuals, agencies, organizations to contact re position paper
2b Analyze information and compile report
JAN FEB 76
4 TF develops instrument to gather data
4a Field test instrument
MAR APR 76
5 Mail out, receive back and tabulate
5a TF agrees on format and outline for draft
5b NFIRE Executive Board approves outline
MAY JUN 76
6 TF prepares 1st draft and refers to all contributors for reactions and suggestions
JUL AUG 76
7 Writing team incorporates ideas, suggestions, prepares final draft for NFIRE
SEP OCT 76
8. NFIRE discusses, modifies/ approves and makes plans for using paper.
8a TF prepares final draft
8b All contributors receive final draft and have opportunity to comment and approve

NFIRE Task Force

Dr. Ray Jongeward, Chairman (Oregon)
Dr. Everett Eddington (New Mexico)
Dr. Larry Heldman (New York)

RJ/cb
12/10/75

A 1974 survey of NFIRE members by Dr. Frank Heesacker which identified a long list of concerns of rural educators was used as a basis for selecting the items used in this study.[1] The resulting list contained 20 or more items and was sent out to the NFIRE members for scrutiny. Members were asked to examine all of them for relevance, clarity, and suggest changes, modifications, and/or additions. Simultaneously, NFIRE members were also asked to review a list of approximately 200 names of people that had been suggested earlier[2] as being persons who were both interested and concerned about rural education. Additions and many corrections resulted from this effort with 125 names remaining on the updated list. The many modifications suggested by NFIRE members from their review were incorporated into a streamlined survey form containing 21 separate items.

The survey of opinions, according to the time schedule, was to be mailed to a national audience during March and April. The survey was actually sent out May 11, 1976, to 125 persons across the nation. In addition, Dr. Heldman, Dr. Edington, and Dr. Gloria Mattera (1976 NFIRE President), distributed 197 more forms among Catskill Study Council, Migrant Education, ERIC-CRESS and other interested persons. A total of 322 survey forms were sent out.

The returns came in rapidly at first, slowing to a trickle that continued throughout the summer. By September there was a 43% return (140 of 322). The tabulated results are shown on the following pages, including the total number of persons responding to each item and the resultant ranking of all items in the survey.

1. Frank Heesacker, NFIRE Survey, 1973.
2. For the conference scheduled at Spring Green, Wisconsin, 1973 which was subsequently cancelled.

NFIRE SURVEY OF RURAL EDUCATION ISSUES

## Introduction

The rural education issues listed below have been screened from a much longer list in an attempt to include items of high interest and concern. The items you and others select will become the ones which the position paper will address.

## Directions

We ask you to consider each item on its own merit without regard to its complexity, cost, or practicality. Read each item, consider its importance to rural education, and check the appropriate column. Feel free to add comments to explain, clarify, and lend emphasis. (Note: The items listed below are not in order of importance.)

| Item | N | Must Include | Don't Include | Don't Care |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The limited number of special services--music, library, special education including handicapped, art, PE, and health--due to small enrollments and the resulting high cost of offering such services | 138 | 86% 118 | 3% 4 | 11% 16 |
| b. The limited course offerings for students, especially at the secondary level | 133 | 87% 116 | 5% 7 | 8% 10 |
| c. The need to find new ways to encourage and increase citizen participation in rural education; strengthen skills of problem solving and decision making; increase communication and collaboration among agencies concerned with rural education | 140 | 86% 120 | 4% 6 | 10% 14 |
| d. The inability to provide adequate career education programs regardless of a community's socio-economic status | 129 | 71% 91 | 7% 9 | 22% 29 |
| e. The difficulty of assessing community needs because staff lack training and are so few in number | 134 | 57% 77 | 24% 33 | 19% 24 |
| f. The high cost of educating rural school children, especially when small enrollments are spread over a large geographic area | 134 | 76% 104 | 12% 16 | 10% 14 |
| g. The apathy and lack of support citizens display toward high quality education | 130 | 60% 78 | 25% 33 | 15% 19 |
| h. The lack of financial support programs aimed at alleviating the problems of remote rural areas | 126 | 87% 110 | 5% 6 | 8% 10 |
| i. The low tax base of most rural districts | 128 | 71% 91 | 16% 20 | 13% 17 |

| Item | N | Must Include | Don't Include | Don't Care |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| j. The failure of state departments of education to recognize their responsibility to rural schools | 133 | 66%<br>88 | 23%<br>31 | 11%<br>14 |
| k. The need for information on the best models of governance in order to develop new, or revise old, legislation | 130 | 58%<br>75 | 17%<br>22 | 25%<br>33 |
| l. The need for rural teachers to be responsible for multiple class preparations | 130 | 60%<br>78 | 22%<br>29 | 18%<br>23 |
| m. The frequent lack of professional help for teachers and students | 132 | 72%<br>94 | 12%<br>17 | 16%<br>21 |
| n. The small budgets available to meet local needs | 131 | 76%<br>99 | 8%<br>10 | 16%<br>22 |
| o. The large percentage of budgets that are allocated to staff and the small portion available for facilities and equipment | 125 | 36%<br>45 | 29%<br>36 | 35%<br>44 |
| p. The need for regional centers to find more accountable means of contracting with clients (school districts) | 132 | 64%<br>85 | 15%<br>20 | 21%<br>27 |
| q. The limited inservice training opportunities for rural teachers and administrators who want to upgrade their skills | 134 | 75%<br>100 | 10%<br>14 | 15%<br>20 |
| r. The black and non-English speaking children who do not receive equal educational opportunities in rural areas | 132 | 70%<br>92 | 14%<br>19 | 16%<br>21 |
| s. The need for more regional units to promote effective and efficient programs | 135 | 67%<br>90 | 16%<br>22 | 17%<br>23 |
| t. The fact that most definitions of "Equal Educational Opportunity" do not recognize geographic isolation or smallness as factors inhibiting EEO for students in such settings | 133 | 84%<br>117 | 5%<br>6 | 11%<br>15 |
| u. The population shift back to rural areas | 133 | 69%<br>92 | 11%<br>15 | 20%<br>26 |

Please add issues/problems omitted and any comments that will assist in the development of the position statement. Use reverse side, if needed.

If you would like a copy of the completed position paper, please include your name and address.

_____

_____

_____

Please return to:

Dr. Ray Jongeward, NFIRE Project Coordinator
NWREL Rural Education Program
710 S.W. Second Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204



REJ/bh/
5/11/76

Upon examination of the survey results, one finds the items clustering into six clusters as follows:

Group I: Five items rated highest (over 80%):

b. The limited course offerings for students, especially at the secondary level

h. The lack of financial support programs aimed at alleviating the problems of remote rural areas

a. The limited number of special services--music, library, special education including handicapped, art, PE, and health--due to small enrollments and the resulting high cost of offering such services

c. The need to find new ways to encourage and increase citizen participation in rural education; strengthen skills of problem solving and decision making; increase communication and collaboration among agencies concerned with rural education

t. The fact that most definitions of "Equal Educational Opportunity" do not recognize geographic isolation or smallness as factors inhibiting EEO for students in such settings

Group II: Three items ranged high (75% - 78%):

f. The high cost of educating rural school children, especially when small enrollments are spread over a large geographic area

n. The small budgets available to meet local needs

q. The limited inservice training opportunities for rural teachers and administrators who want to upgrade their skills

**Group III: Five items fell between 69% and 71%:**

d. The inability to provide adequate career education programs regardless of a community's socio-economic status

i. The low tax base of most rural districts

m. The frequent lack of professional help for teachers and students

r. The black and non-English speaking children who do not receive equal educational opportunities in rural areas

u. The population shift back to rural areas

**Group IV: Three items rated between 64% and 67%:**

s. The need for more regional units to promote effective and efficient programs

j. The failure of state departments of education to recognize their responsibility to rural schools

p. The need for regional centers to find more accountable means of contracting with clients (school districts)

**Group V: The lowest cluster consisted of items between 57% and 60%:**

g. The apathy and lack of support citizens display toward high quality education

l. The need for rural teachers to be responsible for multiple class preparations

k. The need for information on the best models of governance in order to develop new, or revise old, legislation

e. The difficulty of assessing community needs because staff lack training and are so few in number

**Group VI: Trailing far behind in last position was (36%):**

o. The large percentage of budgets that are allocated to staff and the small portion available for facilities and equipment

Summary:

The results of this survey of rural educators shows their top priority concern (over 80%) to be for students:

--their limited course offerings, special services such as music, library, special education for handicapped; and that geographic isolation is not a factor considered in equal opportunity definitions for rural students.

Two other items are also found among the high concerns of rural educators (Group I):

1. the lack of financial support programs aimed at alleviating problems of remote rural areas

2. the need to find new ways to encourage and increase citizen participation; strengthen skills of problem solving, decision making; increase communication/collaboration among agencies.

Thus, the highest survey concerns are for rural students and their services, adequate financial support programs, and for increasing citizen participation and agency collaboration.

Rural educators' concerns that rated high (75 - 78%) included:

--the high cost of education in remote areas, the small budgets to meet local needs, and limited inservice training opportunities for teachers and administrators.

In the third grouping of items (69% - 71%) five more items are included:

--inability to provide adequate career education programs; the low tax base of rural school districts; lack of professional help for teachers and students; minority students who do not receive equal educational opportunities; and, the population shift back to rural areas.

The remaining eight items included a wide range of concerns from the need for regional units to assist rural districts, citizen apathy to finding the best models of governance in order to revise or develop new legislation. The item that was found to be the lowest rated (36%) of all 21 items was the one which indicated that little budget was available for expenditure for facilities and equipment in rural districts.